



Envision Brewster Community Engagement Report April 2014

**Prepared For:
The Village of Brewster**



**Prepared By:
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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Envision Brewster Community Engagement Report is a guide for the Village of Brewster and its Comprehensive Plan Committee. Its purpose is to document the goals, objectives, and vision of the Village of Brewster's residents. It is a reflection of the public input received during the first part of the comprehensive plan update process. A key element of the comprehensive plan process is public participation. Public involvement is critical to the success of this planning effort and the long-term implementation of the plan. Engaging the community in the planning process can strengthen the plan by using local knowledge of various stakeholders. A collaborative planning process that includes various methods of public engagement provides a more open, inclusive, and interactive way of involving citizens in the total planning process, since the Comprehensive Plan becomes the blueprint and guidance document for future planning decisions.

The Envision Brewster Community Engagement Report should help guide future public involvement efforts and enhances the public's access to the Village of Brewster's decision-making process in regards to the Comprehensive Plan.

Summary of Process

To the best of its ability, the public engagement process utilized effective means of providing information and receiving input on the Comprehensive Plan update. The Village of Brewster aimed to offer early, accessible, and meaningful opportunities to the public to be involved in this effort. Throughout the process, residents and stakeholders were invited to participate in discussions on how the plan should evolve and what it should say. Residents and stakeholders clearly expressed their shared values and vision for the future during workshops, meetings, interviews and other public opportunities.

To gain as much public input as possible, the process included many opportunities for the community to get involved. The process included three scheduled public meetings, facilitations with various organizations with strong ties to the community, a survey for residents, and a survey for businesses. All materials were provided in English and Spanish translation. The complete method and process is described on page 6.

Summary of Findings

Community Engagement Meetings

During the larger public engagement meetings and the smaller facilitations with specific Brewster organizations, the citizens of The Village of Brewster were asked what should be maintained in Brewster, what current issues/needs could be met by the Comprehensive Plan, and strategies that could address the current issues. The next paragraph provides a

summary of the comments that were brought up most frequently by the citizens of Brewster. The complete list of comments, however, can be seen in **“Public Participation Results: 1. Community Engagement Comments.”**(Pg.10).

Community Engagement Summary

The citizens of the Village of Brewster value the historical value and architecture of the buildings in the Village. Specifically, there is strong agreement among the residents that there is great value in the old historic buildings such as the Churches, Walter Brewster House, Cameo Theater, and Old Town Hall. The preservation and restoration of these, and other historical landmarks, is very important to the citizens of the Village of Brewster. The community thinks that the Village’s many facilities are very important to maintain, and they enjoy using the Public Library and dining out at Bob’s Diner. The community values the location of the Village of Brewster in relation to highway and train transportation. The residents appreciate and value the presence of the Metro North Train Station, along with the design and upkeep of the station grounds. There is also a strong appreciation of the amount of open space and parks that are made available to the residents of the Village of Brewster.

The major concern about the Village among the citizens is the need to add a variety of businesses to Downtown Brewster and Main Street. The residents of the Village think that it is necessary to create a focal point in the Village, a central gathering place, or something that would make Brewster a tourist destination. The residents are also concerned with traffic congestion in the Village, poorly maintained sidewalks, and the general lack of parking. There is strong support for improving the aesthetics and connectivity of the Village. The residents are calling for the beautification of Downtown Brewster, through more pedestrian friendly sidewalks, and connectivity from downtown to the residential districts; bicycle amenities; streetscape improvement; and access to clean, well-maintained parks. The complete list of issues and concerns of the citizens of Brewster can be seen in **“Public Participation Results: 1. Community Engagement Comments.”** (Pg.14).

The citizens of the Village of Brewster have many ideas of what should be done at the Garden Street School site. Some popular ideas that emerged were to create a community civic center, a satellite campus for a college, or housing. Specifically, the residents think that a mixed-use development with market rate housing, including senior housing, shopping, restaurants, and available workspace, would be suitable for the location. The residents would strongly like to see the site developed in a way that would bring in tax revenue. The complete list of proposed uses can be seen in **“Public Participation Results: 1. Community Engagement Comments.”**(Pg.25).

The participating citizens spent time brainstorming different strategies that could begin to achieve the needs of the Village. These strategies can be found in **“Public Participation Results: 1. Community Engagement Comments.”**(Pg.20). The Comprehensive Plan Committee can consider this input in the next steps of the planning process for the Village of Brewster.

Public Opinion Surveys

Residential:

One-hundred and eighty residential public opinion surveys were filled out during the public engagement process. The majority of the residential citizens of the Village of Brewster think that Brewster's strength lies in the school system, the location and access of the Village, and the natural environment of the surrounding area. Many residents think that the current state of Brewster's Main Street Corridor and the lack of a commercial and shopping area in downtown Brewster are areas of great concern. Based on survey results, which can be seen in their entirety in "**Community Engagement Through Distribution of Surveys: Resident Survey Results**,"(Pg.28) the residents of Brewster would like to see more retail, restaurants, and entertainment development occur in the Village of Brewster. They would not like to see more gas stations, industrial development or apartment housing in the area. Further, the top three priorities that the Comprehensive Plan should focus on include: improving and preserving the Main Street corridor, improving the Brewster's parks and open space, and improving the Village of Brewster's development and growth potential.

Business:

Fifty business surveys were filled out during the public engagement process. The results of these surveys can be seen in their entirety in "**Community Engagement Through Distribution of Surveys: Business Survey Results**."(Pg.43) According to the surveys, business owners of the Village of Brewster would like to see more retail, restaurant, and entertainment development in the Village of Brewster, and they do not want to see industrial development. A concern for the business owners of the Village is adequate parking for customers. The top three priorities that the Comprehensive Plan should focus on include: improving or preserving the Main Street corridor, improving the residential areas in the Village, and the Village of Brewster's development and growth potential.

Public Participation Methods and Process

Comprehensive Plan Committee Meetings

The Village of Brewster Board of Trustees established the Comprehensive Plan Committee in August 2013. The Committee is tasked with updating the Village of Brewster's Comprehensive Plan through a series of regularly scheduled, monthly meetings. The Comprehensive Plan Update Committee meetings are open to the public. The Village of Brewster and the Committee look to involve the residents of Brewster in providing input as to what the vision for the Village's growth, development, and preservation should be for the next 5-10 years.

Public Engagement Meetings

The Comprehensive Plan Committee, contracted with the Land Use Law Center at Pace Law School, to assist them in reaching out to the community to participate in the various public engagement efforts. Two large public meetings were held at the Garden Street School on February 26, 2014 and March 8, 2014 from 7:00pm – 9:00pm. An additional public meeting was held at Village Hall on March 20, 2014 from 10:00am – 12:00pm.

Each meeting was open to the entire public, and facilitated by Tiffany Zezula of the Land Use Law Center, Meghan Taylor from the Putnam County Economic Development Corporation, Barbara Barosa from the Putnam County Planning Department, and Joe Cjaska from Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress.

The Village asked the participants the priority issues, assets, and challenges facing the Village in relation to its land use patterns. This included discussion on community facilities, such as parks and recreation; preservation of cultural and natural resources; transportation issues; economic development; blight; and downtown revitalization. Participants were all asked to strategize about different solutions to the issues raised. Lastly, discussion was had regarding the vacant Garden Street School.

Stakeholder Sessions

Five additional facilitations, with various organizations with strong ties to the community, were held during these organization's monthly meetings. These included the Patterson Rotary Club on January 28, 2014, the Brewster Chamber of Commerce on February 19, 2014, the Brewster Rotary Club on March 4, 2014, the Hill Neighborhood Association on March 13, 2014 and Team Brewster on April 3, 2014. All sessions were conducted similarly to the larger public engagement meetings and participants were asked the same questions as the larger public engagement meetings. The methods used in setting up these organizational meetings are discussed below in "**Methods of Informing the Public about Engagement Opportunities.**"(Pg.7). The complete combined results and key findings of these meetings are documented below in "**Public Participation Results: 1. Community Engagement Comments.**"(Pg.10).

See *Appendix A* for a sample of the English and Spanish versions of the Public Engagement Meeting agendas and discussion documents.

Public Engagement Surveys

Another way that the Village of Brewster's Comprehensive Plan Committee sought to engage the public was through the creation of public opinion surveys. An English and Spanish version of a survey for residents and an English and Spanish version of a survey for business owners was created. The hardcopy of these surveys could be filled out and mailed back to the Village or, if more convenient, could be taken online. The Comprehensive Plan Committee used SurveyMonkey to create the online surveys and the links were provided on all of the informational flyers and emails that were sent out. More can be read about the methods used by the Village to notify the public of the opportunity to engage in the Comprehensive Plan Update in "**Methods of Informing the Public About Engagement Opportunities.**" (Pg.7). The complete combined results and key findings of the public opinion surveys are documented below in "**Community Participation through Residential and Business Surveys: Results and Key Findings.**" (Pg.28).

See *Appendix B* for complete drafts of the English and Spanish versions of both the resident and business public opinion surveys.

Methods of Informing the Public About Engagement Opportunities

A. Flyers

The Comprehensive Plan Committee posted 100 color 11x17 cover stock full bleed signage flyers in storefronts, on bulletin boards, and around the Village of Brewster. These flyers were used to notify the community of the upcoming Public Engagement Meetings and the availability of filling out a survey either by hand or online. Brewster Central School District sent notice to student homes in "e-back pack" – that would include entire village and surrounding town(s) that have a student in the school district or are otherwise on the e-back pack list. Flyers were also included in the February Sewer Bill and March Refuse Bill. A full color flyer was also posted on the Brewster Village Website homepage.

See *Appendix C* for English and Spanish version of the flyers containing the links to the online public opinion surveys.

See *Appendix C* for a picture of the homepage containing the flyer.

B. Mailing of Surveys

The five-page public opinion survey for residents was directly mailed to owner occupied and registered voters within Village of Brewster boundaries. Village Trustee Boissonnault

handed out 140 invitations to the Public Engagement Meetings to nonprofit, commercial, and residential community members.

C. Email outreach

Flyers were sent via email to 110 email recipients who have requested Village of Brewster updates. They were also sent out to Team Brewster, the Zoning Board of Appeals, the Putnam County Economic Development Department, and Brewster10509@Yahoogroups.com (which contains over 700 members primarily residing in or interested in the 10509 zip code). The Land Use Law Center also sent emails containing the flyers with the dates of the Public Engagement Meetings and links to take the online surveys to a list of organizations with close ties to the Village. The emails encouraged each organization to hand out the flyers to their participating members. They also discussed setting up public engagement facilitations at any of the organization's future meetings.

Here is a full list of organizations that were contacted by the Land Use Law Centers email efforts:

- Hill Neighborhood Association
- Brewster Chamber of Commerce
- Putnam County Chamber of Commerce
- Putnam County Realtors Association
- Putnam County Land Trust
- Team Brewster
- HVC Coalition
- Elementary School PTA
- Middle School PTA
- High School PTA
- Brewster Rotary
- Temple Beth Elohim
- Brewster Presbyterian Church
- Church of St. Lawrence O'Toole
- Trinity Lutheran Church
- Grace Assembly of God
- First Baptist Church Brewster
- American Legion

D. Website postings

Announcements were simultaneously posted on four separate Facebook accounts including; Envision Brewster, Village of Brewster, Putnam County Chamber of Commerce, and Putnam County Realtors. Putnam County Chamber of Commerce also posted an announcement on their website.

See *Appendix C* to view the announcement on Putnam County Chamber of Commerce's Website.

E. Newspaper Announcement

There was early and ongoing media coverage in the Putnam County Times, Putnam Examiner, and Southeast-Brewster Patch announcing the Public Engagement Meetings and links to take the online public opinion surveys.

See *Appendix C* to view the Putnam Examiner article "Comprehensive Plan Being Revised in Brewster."

F. Phone Calls

The Village's Comprehensive Plan Committee and the Land Use Law Center reached out to different organizations in the community to set up facilitation meetings at their organizational meetings.

Conclusion

The Envision Brewster Community Engagement Report is a guide for the Village of Brewster and its Comprehensive Plan Committee. Its purpose is to document the goals, objectives, and vision of the Village of Brewster's residents. It is a reflection of the public input received during the first part of the comprehensive plan update process. The Comprehensive Plan Committee should begin to consider the public's opinions about the future development and the Village of Brewster and integrate this information in the next steps of the planning process.

The Envision Brewster Community Engagement Report should help guide future public involvement efforts and enhances the public's access to the Village of Brewster's decision-making process in regards to the Comprehensive Plan.